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THE ESSENTIALS OF BUDDHIST DOCTRINE AND ETHICS.

EVEN an elementary consideration of the Buddhist teachings is dependent upon an historical view of religious development in India, prior to the appearance of Buddha. The singular force of the great teacher's personality is unquestioned. The sweetness of his character and the majesty of his personality stand forth upon the background of India's religious history with a degree of vividness which is strongly enhanced by the absence of other religious figures of any great importance. Of religious thinkers before Buddha's time there was an abundance, and the philosophical thought of India was shaped by them very definitely. But they were rather famous schoolmen than teachers of the people; individually noted for a trick of abstruse thought, rather than a desire to render generally available the light of their respective systems.

The teachings ascribed to Buddha, on the other hand, are genuine products of the intellectual past of India. The leading conceptions are direct heritages from the great Brahmanical development which is accessible to us with remarkable completeness and continuity in the Vedic hymns; in the Brâhmanas, or the Vedic Talmud; in the Upanishads, the Vedic theosophy; and in the later orthodox Brahmanical systems of philosophy. Especially the freer thought of the Upanishads resembles, in its essential aspects, the doctrines of Buddhism to such an extent that a true conception of the latter is a very problematic undertaking without some knowledge of the former.

The religion which we find in India in earliest times, at the time when the Vedic hymns were composed, is a natural religion, in which the sacrifice forms the means of communication between men and the gods. It was a vigorous anthropomorphic polytheism, by the side of which ran an intensely animistic vein down among the lower strata of the people. The chief exponent of the polytheistic beliefs is the Rig-Veda;

the repository of the animistic charms and incantations is the Atharva-Veda; the Brâhmanas describe and expound the sacrifice with great detail.

But by the side of polytheism, animism, and the sacrifice which was intended for the accomplishment of all desires, there flowed a smaller, quieter current of speculative thought, whose beginnings are found in the earliest documents of India. Even the Rig-Veda and the Atharva-Veda contain each a considerable number of hymns of a speculative, cosmogonic, and theosophic character. These present a strangely different tone from the body of the collections within which they are ensconced. From the present state of our knowledge of the chronology of the Vedic texts, we are in the position to say that there is no period of Indian history accessible to us which was entirely free from theosophic speculation. There is especially a class of hymns which present the higher theological insight of the earliest period in the form of charades,—*brahmodya* or *brahmavadya* they are designated in the texts,—which contain very valuable materials for the reconstruction of the more abstract speculations of the earliest times. The words *brahmodya* or *brahmavadya* mean “disputation in the knowledge of holy things.” According to a recent investigation of the writer,* they are theological charades or “quizzes,” which the priests asked one another and answered at the end of certain great sacrifices. They seem to have been intended for the display of theological learning, to impress him who instituted the sacrifice with the excellence and efficiency of the priests who had conducted the sacrifice. These *brahmodya* hymns, and others very kindred in character, contain the earliest Hindu theosophy, and a systematic presentation of their contents is still one of the desiderata in the history of Hindu thought.

But the earlier speculations did not shape themselves into a final philosophy until the period of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are short treatises which follow, nay frequently form a part of the Brâhmanas, and they are the first recorded

* See *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. xv., pp. 172ff. and 184.

attempts at a final philosophy. At that time thought had elevated itself to a height sufficient to recognize that the earlier religion, with its anthropomorphic nature-worship, its liturgies, and the religious technicalities of every-day life, were all of them products of the finite. They were produced, and whatever is produced is transient. To be sure, an orthodox Brahmanical life was necessary in order to obtain the fruits of life which the ordinary man desires. But all this begins to be regarded as preparatory and transitory. And the central doctrine of the Upanishads is the very same as that of Buddhism ; the pivot of all speculation and all mental struggle is the same in both,—it is the desire after emancipation or salvation. Likewise, the means of salvation are the same in both. Now, in order to understand the Buddhist salvation and the accessory teachings, it is absolutely necessary to take notice step by step of the corresponding views of the Upanishads ; there they appear more clearly, in more primitive shape, less far removed from the causes by which they were originated.

The name for the Buddhist salvation is *nirvâna*. Etymologically, the word seems to mean “blowing out.” Every one who has tried his hand at the interpretation of this term has felt painfully the difficulty of the task, and the results presented by the several interpreters differ very considerably. This is not at all to be wondered at : a perfectly single interpretation of the word will never be found. The attempt might as easily be made to precipitate the uses of the Western word “salvation” into one single formula. The difference between the expression “to be saved,” in the mouth of the servant woman, and the free theological thinker, is every bit as great as that which is to be found in the uses of the word *nirvâna*. The latter runs the entire gamut of values from a blissful half-conscious state of repose, a “peace that passeth all understanding,”—in the minds of the vulgar doubtless something very like a physical repose,—to the other extreme, absolute annihilation. There is a small treatise entitled the “*Abhidhâna-ppadîpikâ*,”—a manual of synonyms of Buddhistical religious terms,—which presents forty-six words for *nirvâna*. Among them

occur such terms as *mokkha* or *mutti*, "deliverance;" *tanha-kkaya*, "destruction of desire;" *nibutti*, "quietude;" *arūpa*, "bodilessness," and even *amata*, "immortality." The word *nirvāna* is not a very common one in the texts, and it occurs chiefly in connection with parable and symbolism. In this regard, again, it is closely parallel to our "salvation." One point seems certain, namely, that Buddha himself never gave expression to the doctrine that annihilation was the ultimate outcome of his teaching.

There is a very interesting legend in which, on the contrary, he is obviously represented as dodging the question when put to him point-blank by one of his disciples. The monk Malukya comes to Buddha and complains that the teacher's utterances leave in doubt this most important concern of the human mind: "Is the world eternal or limited? Does the perfected disciple continue to live after death or not? I am not pleased that such questions are left unanswered; hence I am come to the master. May Buddha answer if he can. When an upright man does not know, or is not conversant with a certain subject, he says: 'That I do not know; that I am not conversant with.'" The monk is captious, and will brook no equivocal answer.

Buddha replies that he never attempted to attract disciples by promising them any special information on this topic. "A man who has been wounded by a poisonous arrow does not tell the physician who has come to his aid, 'I shall not let you treat that wound ere I know whether you are a Brahman or a Kshatriya, or ere I know the family antecedents of the man who struck me.' Therefore Buddha did not inform his disciples whether the world is finite or infinite, or whether the holy ones continue to live beyond or not. Because the knowledge of those things does not strengthen holy life, does not lead to peace and illumination. The things that do lead to peace and enlightenment Buddha did teach, namely: the truth of suffering; the truth about the origin of suffering; the truth about the suspension of suffering; the truth about the way to bring about the suspension of suffering. Therefore, O Malukya, what has not been revealed by me, leave

that unrevealed; and what has been revealed, that suffer to be revealed."

In attempting to present a definition of nirvâna, we must content ourselves with striking an average, or perhaps rather stating a few salient points on the infinitely fluctuating line of the conceptions of the word. The following seems to be a fair presentation: A condition of total cessation of changes; of perfect rest, of the absence of desire, illusion and sorrow; the complete resolution of the compounded physical man. But, above all, we are helped by taking the parallel speculations which preceded the Buddhist nirvâna in the schools of the Upanishads. We shall see that the nirvâna is the faded residuum of the belief that the human soul escapes the round of births, and is fused with the pantheistic all-soul, as soon as it is enabled by insight into the true nature of existence to break the rivets which fasten it to the visible, yet illusory world.

In the Upanishads the conception of an all-soul is of paramount importance. This is frequently designated as *sat*, a word which is, etymologically identical with the Greek τὸ ὄν. But even more frequent, and destined to assume more permanent form, is the composite conception of the *âtman*, "the breath," and the *brahma*, "the essence of spiritual thought." In the view of the Hindus, the human body is pervaded by breaths, *âtman* (Gr. ἀντημῆν): these vivify the body, and are the essential part, the Ego, of the individual existence. This *âtman*, after it has been adjusted to individual man, is transferred to the great universe outside of man. There arises a "breath of the universe," or "universal breath." The *âtman*, the lord of the breaths, is at the same time the lord of the gods, the creator of all beings: all the worlds are but an emanation of his great universal Ego; the *âtman* is the all.

The second all-embracing cosmic conception is that of the *brahma*. The sacred word, the constant companion of the sacrifice, contains again a kind of spiritual essence which elevates it above every profane word, and the entire profane world. That is the *brahma* used in the neuter gender, not as

yet the personified god Brahma who stands later at the head of the so-called Hindu trinity,—Brahma, Vishnu, and Çiva. Thus we have in the âtman and the brahma two manifestations of the final universal power: the former representing the physical and the latter the spiritual side of universal life. As might be expected, the two ideas, in due time, merge into one, the conception of a great eternal existence, in which all the differences of visible phenomena are resolved: the universe, including all its physical, mental, and spiritual phases lives and moves through it. This product of early Hindu speculation came to stay in India; all the philosophies, including Buddhism, stand upon this ground, and they all accept the consequences, deduced from this fundamental thought, with modifications of comparatively secondary importance. When we find that the Buddhist longs for nirvâna, we have before us the longing of the philosopher of the Upanishad to be merged in the all-soul. The nirvâna is the pantheistic Brahma, with its personality and its attributes reduced to a mere blank—to zero.

The term which is employed in Buddhism to depict all states preceding nirvâna is *samsâra*, "the round of births." Here, also, we stand before an heir-loom from a distant past. The beginnings of metempsychosis—nay, even the first occurrence of the word *samsâra*—can still be traced in the Upanishads. The earliest Vedic time knows nothing of the wandering of the soul after death. There is, on the contrary, a simple, poetic belief in a future life which appeals thoroughly to the natural instincts of man. Whence came the first germ of metempsychosis it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty. It is possible that it had percolated from aboriginal non-Aryan beliefs into the musings of the philosophic schools. Like the Brahma, it is, too, a conception which works its way through misty, hesitating beginnings, to rigid doctrinary ends. But when it finally had assumed a definite shape we find the plain doctrine that every creature is again and again the prey of death, until in some life all desire and all activity, as the outcome of this desire, have been laid aside.

The doctrine of metempsychosis, from the first moment of

its appearance in the literature, is closely associated with pessimism. In the Upanishads it is viewed with perfect consistency as a state of separation from the perfect all-soul, the Brahma. Human existence is not, as might have been the case, viewed as an emanation from the all-soul, but as a species of conflict with it. The Brahma is perfect, existence is imperfect. This is Buddha's "truth of suffering" in the controversy with the monk Malukya, quoted above. The cause of suffering is formulated in the Buddhistical writings under the twin terms *tanha*, Sanskrit *trshâ*, "thirst" or "desire," and *kamma*, Sanskrit *karma*, "deed." The *tanha* is the unsatisfied, and not to be satisfied, desire for things that belong to the state of personal existence in the physical world. In the Upanishads also occurs the statement: "When the mortal has freed himself from every desire of his heart, then does he enter immortal into Brahma." The unquenched desire is looked upon as a real force which has creative power, and it is itself sufficiently powerful to draw the being back into mundane existence, to produce the chain of existences which make up the *samsâra*. At this point the doctrine of the karma steps in. The successive births are affected by the nature of the unsatisfied desires, and by the merits or demerits of the individual. The broad rule is that a highly meritorious life is succeeded by a relatively happy existence; it accumulates, as it were, a good balance for the individual concerned. On the other hand, if there is an excess of demerit, the next birth is wretched and full of suffering. Edwin Arnold in his "Light of Asia" has exercised his great poetic gift in describing the karma as

"All that total of a soul
Which is the things it did, the thoughts it had,
The 'self' it wove, with woof of viewless time,
Crossed on the warp invisible of acts."

The chain of evils which fastens itself upon all individual existence is thus seen to be composed of various links. An illusory estimate of life and the world creates desire; desire leads to action; all action is by its very nature finite and doomed to produce fruit; it dooms the individual to end-

less existence: again and again he is food for death. What then is the cure for desire, the thirst for life and its contents? The Upanishads answer, *knowledge*. Knowledge of the unity of the individual Ego with the great Brahmic principle, and the knowledge, ever present, of the divided condition of everything finite. "When a mortal has recognized Brahma, feeling 'he is myself,' how can he then desire and cling to bodily life?" Thus the ultimate attainment for man is this recognition; when it is attained all desire vanishes of its own accord. In the Buddhist system a somewhat secondary and schematic formula is known as "the way to the suspension of suffering." It is the so-called eightfold path: right belief, right resolution, right speech, right deeds, right life, right ideals, right thoughts, right memory, right meditation. All this is but the principle of "knowledge" brought down to every-day life; these terms embody the need of this highest knowledge in daily conduct, in order that it shall be finally fruitful.

The difference between early Brahmanic and Buddhist religion is chiefly this, that the Brahmans kept their theosophic knowledge to themselves without making propaganda for it. To the people, the Brahman philosophers gave nothing but a polytheistic worship, which kept changing the attractive early beliefs into an idolatry which grew more and more grotesque at every stage of its development. Buddha brought the philosophical beliefs of his time down to the people with modifications comparatively slight, and the chief interest which attaches itself to the treatment of this fundamentally theosophic system in the hands of the great teacher is this, that it opened the door for the gentle ethical system which has rendered Buddhism a great world-religion, and has always elicited the profound interest of Western minds. We must, however, not neglect to emphasize sufficiently that Buddhism could not have originated without the personal activity of Buddha. The conformation of its ethical system is doubtless due in a large measure to the personal character of the founder of the system. The legend of Buddha sets clearly before our eyes a truly admirable figure: a man of quiet majesty, of

humor without acerbity, full of tenderness for all living things, of perfect balance and moral freedom, exempt from every prejudice. It does not matter much whether the picture is in a measure legendary or not; it stood at any rate very early before the members of the church, and affected them as only a living person could. Buddha, too, is loved for a great personal sacrifice: it was to save others that he was born as Gautama Çakyamuni, "the Prince Siddhartha," having disdained to enter nirvâna. He chose to develop up to Buddhahood at the cost of countless preliminary existences with their ceaseless round of sufferings. This is called the act of "great renunciation." The ideal of the Brahman is very similar to that of the Buddhist, but it is entirely for himself: he aspires to save himself; the great names of Brahman teachers are those of faded traditional personages, who had, so to speak, invented a new device, or exhibited an unusual amount of cleverness in accomplishing this end. Buddha made over the Hindu system of salvation, along with the finest flower of Hindu ethical feeling, to every person, high or low, gifted or ignorant, without stint and without exception.

One may ask with some degree of astonishment, "Where is the door which admits any system of ethics, as a part of a philosophy which broaches with such dangerous closeness on nihilism?" He who expects rigid logical consistency in the juncture of ethics with such a philosophy will be disappointed. But we are still in the position to show just where it slipped in—without desiring to indicate by this expression that there was ever a period in India devoid of good laws of conduct, and the practical application of the dictates of civilized humanity. What is meant is, that by the neglect of Brahmanical worship, Brahmanical sacrifice and dogma, and Brahmanical restrictions of caste, the ethical side of Indian thought found an opportunity to conquer for itself a place of high importance, from which it was previously shut out by other interests.

Buddhist ethics are joined directly to the doctrine of suffering, as we may call it. This is the very corner-stone of the edifice. It is designated with schematic regularity as the four-

fold doctrine of suffering, being presented again and again in four statements which form a close sequence.

1. The truth of suffering : Birth is suffering, age is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is not loved is suffering, separation from what is loved is suffering.

2. The origin of suffering : The thirst after existence which leads from birth to birth, and to the desire for lust and power.

3. Suspension of suffering : Giving up the thirst for existence by cutting out all desires.

4. The way to the suspension of suffering : Right belief, right resolution, right speech, right deeds, right life, right ideals, right thoughts, right memory, right meditation. This, as has been stated above, is the eightfold noble path.

The last of these clauses is the foundation of Buddhist ethics, and the presence of it as the final member of the group of four theses in the doctrine of suffering impresses upon it and the subsequent details a character which Buddhist laws of conduct can never quite strip off. Evidently ethical law here is not founded upon the dictates of a higher power, nor is there anywhere the suggestion of a law of universal harmony, or necessity, by which the single individual is led forcibly to follow a line of conduct which suits the universe. The difference between good and evil conduct, roughly stated, is the effect upon the individual himself. Good conduct in a small way produces relative happiness in life, and advance of station in the round of existences ; in a large way it becomes the motive-power towards the highest aim, the resolution into the all, the nirvâna. This doctrine of suffering concentrates all serious attention upon the Ego, and for the Buddhist this metaphysical term steps out from the frame of an abstract system, and assumes a reality so strong that everything without fades at times into absolute insignificance. To find the Ego is praised as the best aim of all search ; to be friends with the Ego is the truest and highest friendship. The Ego spurs to good ; through the Ego one knows one's self, and the Ego watches and protects. The Ego is the ultimate refuge, therefore it shall be held in check as the dealer holds a noble steed.

One's own Ego must first of all be securely founded on good ; after that others may be instructed.

This may, perhaps, be regarded as the most characteristic point in Buddhist ethics, and its very prominence makes it important that it shall not be misunderstood. It is a spiritual egoism whose existence and development are hostile to and exclude practical selfishness by its very existence. The Buddhistic writings employ parable and story at every step. One of these we may not withhold, since it is perhaps more significant for the understanding of the very essence of Buddhist ethics than any other. It is the story of Prince Kunāla, the son of the great Buddhist Emperor Aṣoka, about 250 B.C.

Kunāla—his name was given him on account of his wonderfully beautiful eyes—lives away from the turmoil of the court, devoted to his introspective thoughts. One of the queens falls in love with him ; but neither her seductions nor her threats, when she is rejected, move Kunāla. She thirsts for vengeance. Owing to her intrigues, he is sent to a distant province, and thither she sends an order of the king, signed with the royal ivory seal, which she has cunningly managed to get into her hands : Kunāla's eyes are to be torn out. When the order arrives no one has the heart to lay hand on the beautiful eyes of the prince. The prince himself announces a reward for the one who will execute the command of the king. At last an evil-looking individual is found ready to do the deed. The wails of the multitude accompany the tearing out of the first eye. Kunāla takes it into his hand and says, "Why do you not see the forms which you did see a moment ago, O you coarse ball of flesh ? How do they deceive themselves who cling to you and say, 'This is I !'" And after his second eye is lost, he says, "The eye of flesh, difficult to obtain, I have lost ; but I have gained the perfect, blameless eyes of wisdom. The king has abandoned me, but I am the son of the exalted king of truth : his child I am called." He is told that the queen and not the king had issued the order, and rejoins, "May she long enjoy fortune, life, and power—she who brought me such bliss." And he goes as a beggar to the city of his father, and sings before the palace to the accompani-

ment of a lute. The king hears his voice, and, in the course of their interview, the truth comes to light. In his excessive grief and anger the king would have the queen tortured and killed; but Kunāla says, "It is not fit that you should slay her. Act according to honor and do not slay a woman. The highest reward comes to those who feel kindly: the perfect Buddha has praised patience;" and he kneels down before the king and says, "O king, I feel no pain, and no wrath on account of the cruelty from which I have suffered. My heart feels but kindness for my mother, who commanded that my eyes be torn out. As surely as these words are true, may my eyes again be as they were." Then his eyes shone in their former beauty.

Nowhere does Buddhist poetry exalt forgiveness and the love of enemies higher than in this charming story. And yet there is about this even a certain breath of coolness which we find in all Buddhist morality. It is less from the heart than from the head; it is from that *knowledge* which kills desire and leads to nirvāna. The Buddhist sage stands upon a height which cannot be reached by the doings of men. Wrong does not anger him, but he also does not suffer from it. His enemies have power over his body; his Ego they cannot touch.

The pervasiveness of this fundamental principle of Buddhist belief is such that even the more practical side, the side of every-day morality, constantly runs up against it. The Buddhists have no formal compendium of morals; they schematize as they go along—sometimes one way, sometimes another, according as one or another side of human life is prominent in the mind. Yet three categories turn up again and again, as though they were the headings of three chapters in a system of ethics. The first is righteousness, upright life. The conditions of righteousness are laid down in a definite pentologue. 1. To kill no living being. 2. Not to touch the property of another. 3. Chastity. 4. Truthfulness. 5. Abstaining from intoxicating liquors. It is but just to say right here that no religious system was ever more in earnest with its own prescriptions than Buddhism was with the five points

of this pentologue. The first, the doctrine of *ahimsā*, "inviolability," that is, pity for living things, is insisted upon with rigid consistency in the Buddhist canonical writings, and many touching stories abound, which show with how much genuine feeling and cordiality of belief pity was practised. But the other two chapters turn the practical morality again into the channel of that single and singular interest, the destruction of desire and the escape from the bonds of existence, which has been, as it were, the text of our entire presentation. The second chapter is concentration; the third, wisdom. In the narration of Buddha's last sermons we find repeatedly what purports to be his own summary of his doctrine :

" This is righteousness. This is concentration. This is wisdom. He who is penetrated by righteousness, *his* concentration becomes fruitful and blissful. He who is strong in concentration, *his* wisdom becomes fruitful and blissful. The soul penetrated by wisdom is released entirely from evil—from the evil of desire, from the evil of coming into existence, from the evil of error, from the evil of ignorance."

The three domains are compared with the stations of a journey; the end is *nirvāna*. The foundation of all is righteousness; but righteousness obtains its value and its completion through wisdom. If it does not lead in that direction it leads nowhere. Buddhism is not for those who are poor in spirit, and we may regard it as certain that the spread of this religious system is not due to the philosophy at its foundation, but to the incidentally sterling dictates and the pure example of those who were far enough advanced in thought to strive for the fruits of the philosophy.

The essence of ancient Buddhism seems to have been concentrated into one good metrical tract called the *Dhammapada*, a collection of aphorisms which reminds us in many ways of biblical texts, especially the book of Proverbs. Thus especially such sentences as the following have the true Solomonic ring (see stanzas 63 and 64) :

" The fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least so far. But a fool who thinks himself wise, he is called a fool indeed.

" If a fool be associated with a wise man even all his life, he will perceive the truth as little as a spoon perceives the taste of soup."

The desire to be rid of earthly existence is expressed most intensely as follows (stanzas 60, 153, 154, 383):

"Long is the night to him who is awake; long is a mile to him who is tired; long is life to the foolish who do not know the true law.

"Looking for the builder of this house [the body], I have run through a course of many births in vain: painful is birth again and again. Now I have seen thee, O maker of the house; thou shalt not make up this house again. All thy rafters are broken, thy ridge-pole is sundered. The soul, approaching the eternal, has attained to the extinction of all desires.

"Stop the stream, sturdily drive away the desires, O Brahman! When you have understood the perishableness of all that was created, you will understand that which was not created."

The praises of him who has obtained by resignation the terrestrial nirvâna are sung ecstatically (stanzas 94, 197, 198):

"The gods even envy him whose senses, like horses well broken in by the driver, have been subdued, who is free from pride, and free from appetites.

"We live happily, then, not hating those who hate us; among men who hate us we dwell free from hatred.

"We live happily, then, free from ailments among the ailing; among men who are ailing we dwell free from greed."

A considerable domain of ethical life is sketched in stanzas 222, 223, 3-5; here the attitude of the ideal Buddhist towards wrath and revenge is stated forcefully:

"He who holds back rising anger like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver; other people are but holding the reins.

"Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth.

"He abused me, he beat me, he oppressed me, he robbed me"—in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will never cease.

"He abused me, he beat me, he oppressed me, he robbed me"—in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred will cease.

"For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule."

The following two stanzas show the way to a pure life, and the blissful condition which ensues:

"One by one, little by little, moment by moment, a wise man frees himself from personal impurities as a refiner blows away the dross of silver.

"There is a treasure laid up in the heart, a treasure of charity, purity, temperance, soberness. A treasure secure, impregnable, that no thief can steal: a treasure that follows after death."

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